

# Niagara Farmers' Monthly

## Vineland Growers' Co-operative an agri-food innovator

Organization wins provincial recognition for Cold Snap Pear

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### Agri-Food Innovation award

Submitted Photo

*The Vineland Growers' Cooperative were among the winners at December's Agri-Food Innovation awards. The organization received recognition for its Cold Snap Pear. In the photo, from left: Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Jeff Leal, Matthew Ecker, Michael Ecker, Phil Tregunno, John Thwaites, June Denbak, Premier Kathleen Wynne.*

It's one of the world's oldest industries, but that doesn't mean innovation stops in agriculture.

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Jeff Leal honoured a number of Ontario groups at the 10th annual Premier's Awards for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence in December. Among the award recipients was Niagara-based Vineland Growers' Cooperative, which received one of three Leaders in Innovation awards.

"Ontario's food producers, processors and agri-food organizations recognize the importance of innovation to keeping this sector of our economy competitive, sustainable and attractive to the next generation," said Wynne. "With these awards, we are recognizing them for their efforts. We will continue to work together to sustain the future success of this important industry."

The Vineland Growers' Cooperative Ltd. received the award for its new large, blight-resistant pear variety developed with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The Cold Snap Pear allows consumers access to locally grown throughout the winter months.

"Our government is proud of the work Ontario's agri-food innovators are doing to create or transform products and lead new businesses and make innovative ideas into reality to provide us with more fresh, local and delicious food," said Leal.

"By doing so, these remarkable Ontarians are designing their own future, helping to grow our sector and are laying the foundation for Ontario's next generation in agri-food."

Joining the growers' cooperative as award recipients were the Asparagus Farmers of Ontario and Evynn's Advantage, which both won Leaders in Innovation awards.

The Simcoe-based AFO received its award for being the first grower organization to develop its own seed business. In 1996, the organization – which represents 90 growers across the province – negotiated exclusive rights to new asparagus varieties developed through the University of Guelph's breeding program. The Guelph Millennium variety quickly became the asparagus of choice for farmers across Ontario, and represents 95 per cent of all asparagus grown in Ontario. It can also be found in Michigan, Washington and elsewhere.

In 2017 a second variety, called Guelph Eclipse, is slated to hit the market.

A health scare with their daughter led Durham region's Jeff and Carol Syme to create a new liquid nutritional product, and led to a new company and a Leader in Innovation award.

Because of a heart condition Evynn, the couple's daughter, required liquid formulas delivered directly to the stomach through a gastric tube. However, Evynn developed an intolerance to the formula, leading Jeff and Carol to create their own blend from whole, fresh foods. The turnaround was amazing, and Evynn required no hospital visits within 18 months of the switch.

The Symes then started Evynn's Advantage and is preparing to launch its first products, which are made from Ontario vegetables, fruits, grains and yogurt.

Other award winners included Northumberland County's First Ontario Shrimp Ltd., which received the Minister's Award, and York region's Dairy Quality Inc., which received the Premier's Award.

First Ontario Shrimp Ltd. is Ontario's first shrimp producers. The Cocchio family converted one of their hog barns into a shrimp facility, and now produces 136 kilograms of Pacific white shrimp a week.

Dairy Quality Inc. received the Premier's Award for its work developing new tools for early detection of mastitis in dairy cows. The device connects to an iPhone or iPod Touch.

<http://www.niagarathisweek.com/community-story/7051833-vineland-growers-cooperative-an-agri-food-innovator/>